Environmental Concerns Become Priority

Over the years, many of the site's buildings, much of the equipment, and acres of land were contaminated as a result of waste storage and disposal practices at the time. In 1989, Rocky Flats was listed on the National Priorities List as a Superfund Cleanup Site. In all, the site had more than 170 areas of suspected environmental contamination.

The Rocky Flats Cleanup Agreement, signed by DOE, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment in 1996, is the regulatory agreement that provides the framework for and governs cleanup activities at the site. Under oversight of the DOE's Rocky Flats Field Office, Kaiser-Hill Company plans and directs a team of specialized subcontractors cleaning up the site.

At Rocky Flats, environmental cleanup is being accomplished by prioritizing projects based on risk, employing innovative cleanup technologies, and using accelerated actions to address risks.

Protesters at the Gates

In 1969, a small protest group led a walk from Rocky Flats to the State Capitol in Denver in memorial of the dropping of atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The walk marked the start of two decades of anti-nuclear protests at Rocky Flats. Protesters demanded that the plutonium at the site be moved elsewhere and that Rocky Flats be closed down.

Today, activists and Rocky Flats employees share a common goal: to safely clean up and close down the site.

Pride and Community

From the start, Rocky Flats employees developed a pride in their work, a unity with one another, and a commitment to support local community service. Working in an isolated area and further isolated by the secrecy of their work, employees formed a social organization, "The Coloradans," in 1952 to organize an employee picnic and other events. The first Family Day was held in 1970 drawing 7,700 people.

Employees were also supporters of local community service, organizing the Donate Once (DO) Club in 1976 to provide a single channel for employees to contribute to charitable, welfare, and educational causes. Employees are consistently among the top donors of blood to the Bonfils Center.

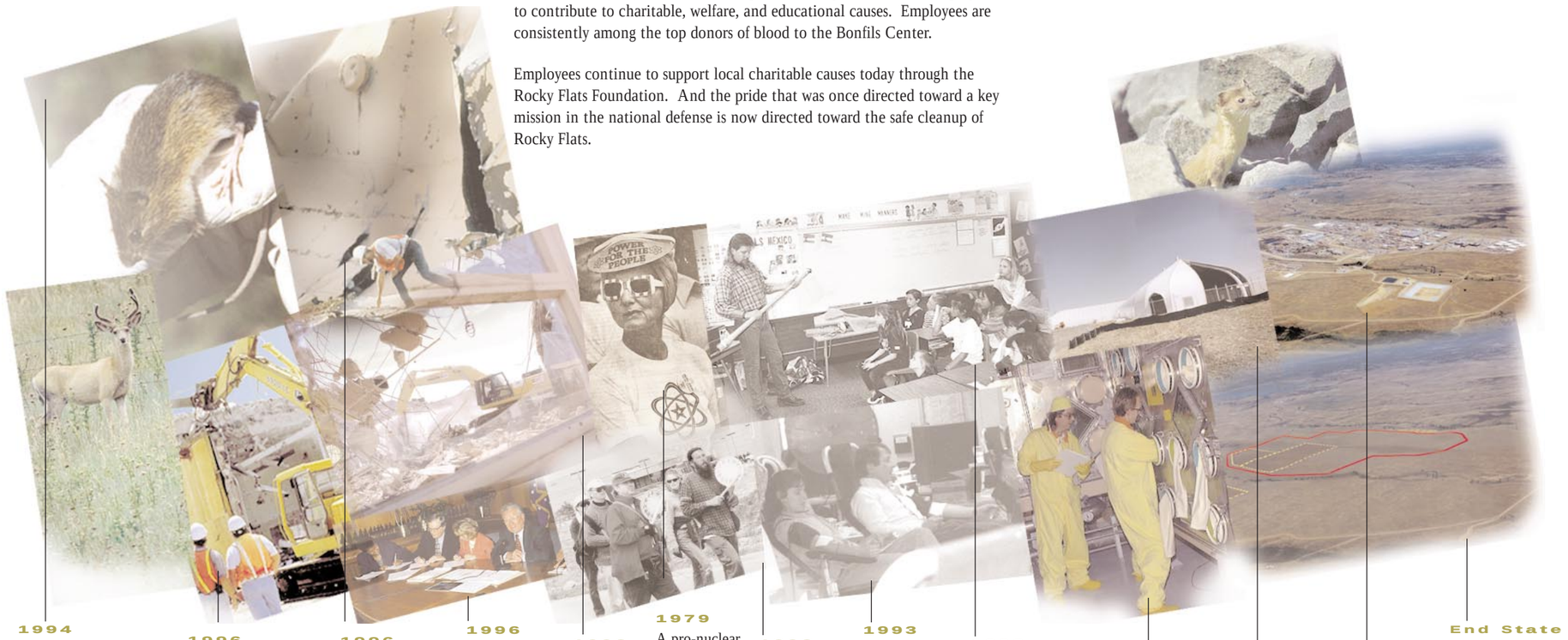
Employees continue to support local charitable causes today through the Rocky Flats Foundation. And the pride that was once directed toward a key mission in the national defense is now directed toward the safe cleanup of Rocky Flats.

Accelerating Closure

Today, the final chapter in the history of Rocky Flats is being written. Planning for site closure began in 1994. Early estimates put cleanup and closure costs up to $36 billion over 65 years. In 1995, Kaiser-Hill was awarded a five-year performance-based integrating management contract. Kaiser-Hill integrates work performed by a team of contractors, each with specific expertise relevant to site closure. In a joint effort, DOE and Kaiser-Hill restructured the closure project into a plan to close the Site by 2010 at a cost of $7.3 billion.

The Rocky Flats Closure Project is now being performed as a series of projects encompassing five major elements – Special Nuclear Materials stabilization, packaging, and consolidation; deactivation, decommissioning, and demolition; environmental restoration; property and records disposition; and offsite shipment. The DOE has challenged Rocky Flats and the entire DOE complex to close Rocky Flats four years ahead of schedule, by 2006, and Kaiser-Hill has developed a detailed and ambitious new baseline that specifies the steps needed to get there.

Together, the Rocky Flats work force is moving closer toward their goal to "Make It Safe. Clean It Up. Close It Down."



1994
The site's Buffer Zone is habitat to the Preble's Meadow Jumping Mouse

1996
Building 889 is the first radioactively contaminated structure to come down

1996
Metal shearer brings the fuel storage tanks down

1996
The Rocky Flats Cleanup Agreement is signed

1998
Demolition of Building 123

1979
A pro-nuclear rally is held attracting 16,000 nuclear supporters

1998
The 20-year reunion of protesters

1993
Employees helping the community by giving blood

1998
Rocky Flats' employee sharing knowledge with local school children

1997
Building 707 risk reduction

1998
Trench 1 weather shelter

1996
Aerial view of the site

End State

Note: Above is a compilation of significant events.

Rocky Flats

HISTORY

From weapons to cleanup and closure, the Rocky Flats site, its mission, and its employees have come a long way. Just a few short years ago, the site cleanup and closure was expected to take 65 years and cost in excess of $36 billion. Today, the site is working to a closure schedule of 2010 for $7.3 billion. The DOE has challenged Rocky Flats and the entire DOE complex to close Rocky Flats four years ahead of schedule, by 2006, and Kaiser-Hill has developed a detailed and ambitious new baseline that specifies the steps needed to get there.

Rocky Flats Meets Cold War Need

The quest for nuclear explosives, driven by the fear that Hitler's Germany might invent them first, was an epic top-secret engineering and industrial venture in the United States during World War II. An enormous effort involving vast resources and the best scientific minds in the world, the "Manhattan Project" took less than three years to create a working atomic bomb. By mid-1945, the United States had exploded the first atomic device at a site near Alamogordo, New Mexico.

Achievements of the Manhattan Project left the United States as the sole nuclear power in the world until 1949. On August 29 of that year, the Soviet Union successfully conducted "First Lightning," their first nuclear test. Dubbed "Joe One," in the United States, the test gave new focus to the American nuclear program. In 1950, President Harry S. Truman gave the order for the Atomic Energy Commission to develop the hydrogen bomb. The same year, Congress authorized significant expansion of the nuclear weapons program.

In 1951, the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), the early predecessor to today's Department of Energy (DOE), selected the Rocky Flats area as the site for a nuclear weapons production facility. The AEC singled out Dow Chemical Company to operate the project with the mission of machining a plutonium component for use in atomic weapons. Construction started on the site's first permanent building (991) on July 10 of that year, and production began in April 1952.

Site Mission Grows

From 1952 to 1989, the primary mission of Rocky Flats was the production of nuclear and non-nuclear weapons components for the nation's nuclear arsenal. The key component produced was the plutonium pit, commonly referred to as the "trigger," which provides energy to fuel the explosion of a nuclear weapon.

In 1955, the plant's production facilities were expanded, a pattern that was repeated a number of times as the nuclear arms race escalated. With the growth of Denver, a Buffer Zone of 4,600 acres around the site was authorized in 1972. Rockwell International assumed responsibility for the operation of the site July 1, 1975.

In June 1989, Rocky Flats was raided by agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Environmental Protection Agency due to alleged environmental crimes. In December of that year, nuclear production work was halted to address environmental and safety concerns. January 1, 1990, EG&G, Inc., assumed operation of the site, working toward resumption of operations in the plutonium buildings. With the President's 1992 announcement of cancellation of the W-88 Trident Warhead Program, Rocky Flats' production mission was permanently halted. In 1993, the Secretary of Energy formally announced the end of nuclear production at Rocky Flats. And, in 1994, the last defense production-related shipment was sent out of Building 460, as non-nuclear work also came to a close at Rocky Flats.

Security a Way of Life

From the outset, security was a way of life at Rocky Flats. To deter espionage or theft of nuclear materials, the site was protected by a perimeter fence and secured by a guard force.

In 1967, black and white identification badges for employees were replaced with colored badges. A bigger change came in 1983 with the completion of the Perimeter Security Zone around the site's plutonium buildings. Two years later, the addition of a Perimeter Intrusion Detection Assessment System assured detection of any unauthorized passage through the security zone.

In 1990, Wackenhut Services, Inc., took over responsibility for protective services at Rocky Flats. Wackenhut continues in that role today.

Today, the site works to balance a new policy of openness and public accountability with the continuing need to safeguard plutonium and other special nuclear materials. The need for security will remain a key part of the site mission until the last special nuclear materials are moved off site.

Safety First from the Start

The year the plant began production, General Manager F. H. Langell also organized a division safety program. Safety has remained a major focus on site since that time.

In 1962, the plant reached 17,000,000 safe man-hours without a lost-time injury. The site received the Atomic Energy Commission's Award of Honor for the fourth time, the Dow President's Award for the third time, and the National Safety Council Award of Honor for the fourth time. The following year saw the plant reach a record of 22,295,542 man-hours without a disabling injury.

The site also contributed to the broader sphere of nuclear safety with the development of new equipment. The gamma spectrometer (1958) was developed to determine whether plutonium was present in wounds. An automatic hand counter for alpha radiation (1963) was also developed on site as was the SX-139 Supplied Breathing Air Garment (1983).

Today, the Kaiser-Hill Team continues the strong commitment to safety at the site. The Kaiser-Hill Team has reduced the rate at which injuries or illnesses occur by over 30 percent since becoming the integrating management contractor in July 1995. This achievement has been accomplished by involving workers in planning and implementing work activities and holding management accountable to execute work safely.

1945 Atomic testing begins

1952 Announcement of Rocky Flats Plant

1952 Construction begins on west gate guard post

1967 Aerial view of site, looking east

1998 Glovebox hold-up measurement in Building 371

1946 The Atomic Energy Commission is formed

1989 FBI and EPA agents raid site

1978 Atomic Materials Rail Transport (ATMX) cars are loaded at Building 664

1982 New tanks arrive on site

1953 A firefighter poses by a Plant fire truck

1997 PACS 1 hand scanning goes into effect

1953 Dow organizes a division safety program

1958 Invention of the gamma spectrometer used for uranium analysis

1958 Shielded Inert Gas Metallic Arc (SIGMA) welding

1997 Infinity room decon is performed in a PremAire suit

1998 READY-98, Emergency Response Organization exercise

Note: Above is a compilation of significant events.